# Nothing But Leaves

A Sermon
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"He found nothing but leaves."—Mark 11:13.

MOST of the miracles of Moses were grand displays of divine justice. What were the first ten wonders but ten plagues? The same may be said of the prophets, especially of Elijah and Elisha. Was it not significant both of the character and mission of Elias when he called fire from heaven upon the captains of fifties; nor was he upon whom his mantle descended less terrible when the she-bears avenged him upon the mockers. It remained for our incarnate Lord to reveal the heart of God. The only begotten was full of grace and truth, and in his miracles pre-eminently God is set forth to us as LOVE. With the exception of the miracle before us, and perhaps, a part of another, all the miracles of Jesus were entirely benevolent in their character; indeed this one is no exception in reality, but only in appearance. The raising of the dead, the feeding of the multitude, the stilling of the tempest, the healing of diseases—what were all these but displays of the lovingkindness of God? What was this to teach us but that Jesus Christ came forth from his Father on an errand of pure grace?

"Thine hands, dear Jesus, were not arm'd
With an avenging rod,
No hard commission to perform
The vengeance of a God.
But all was mercy, all was mild,
And wrath forsook the throne,
When Christ on his kind errand came
And brought salvation down."

Let us rejoice that God commendeth his *love* towards us, because in "due time Christ died for the ungodly."

Yet, as if to show that Jesus the Savior is also Jesus the Judge, one gleam of justice must dart forth. Where shall mercy direct its fall? See, my brethren, it glances not upon a man, but lights upon an unconscious, unsuffering thing—a tree. The curse, if we may call it a curse at all, did not fall. on man or beast, or even the smallest insect; its bolt falls harmlessly upon a fig tree by the wayside. It bore upon itself the signs of barrenness, and perhaps was no one's property; little, therefore, was the loss which any man sustained by the withering of that verdant, mockery, while instruction more precious than a thousand acres of fig trees has been left for the benefit of all ages. The only other instance at which I hinted just now

was the permission given to the devils to enter into the swine, and the whole herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters. In that case, again, what a mercy it was that the Savior did not permit a band of men to become the victims of the evil one. It was infinitely better that the whole herd of swine should perish than that one poor man should be rendered a maniac through their influence. The creatures choked in the abyss were nothing but swine—swine which their Jewish owners had no right to keep; and even then they did not perish through Jesus Christ's agency, but through the malice of the devils, for needs must even swine run when the devil drives.

Observe, then, with attention, this solitary instance of stern judgment wrought by the Savior's hand. Consider seriously that if only once in his whole life Christ works a miracle of pure judgment, the lesson so unique must be very full of meaning. If there be hut one curse, where does it fall? What is its symbolic teaching? I do not know that I ever felt more solemnly the need of true fruitfulness before God than when I was looking over this miracle—parable—for such it may justly be called. The curse, you at once perceive, falls in its metaphorical and spiritual meaning upon those high professors who are destitute of true holiness; upon those who manifest great show of leaves, but who bring forth no fruit unto God. Only one thunderbolt, and that for boasting pretenders; only one curse, and that for hypocrites. O blessed Spirit, write this heart-searching truth upon our hearts!

I. We will commence our exposition with the remark that THERE WERE MANY TREES WITH LEAVES ONLY UPON THEM, AND YET NONE OF THESE WERE CURSED BY THE SAVIOR, SAVE ONLY THIS FIG TREE. It is the nature of many trees to yield to man nothing but their shade. The hungering Savior did not resort to the oak or to the elm to look for food, nor could the fir tree, nor the pine, nor the box, offer him any hope of refreshment; nor did he breathe one hard word concerning them, for he knew what was in them, and that they neither were, nor pretended to be fruit-bearing trees. So, dear friends, there are many men whose lives bear leaves, but no fruit—and yet, thanks be unto God, almighty patience bears with them. They are allowed to live out their time, and then it is true they are cut down and cast into the fire; but while they are permitted to stand, no curse withers them: the longsuffering of God waiteth to be gracious to them. Here are some of the characters who have leaves but no fruit.

There are thousands who ignorantly follow *the sign and know nothing of the substance.* In England, we think ourselves far in advance of Popish countries; but how much of the essence of Popery peeps out in the worship of very many! They go to Church or chapel, and they think that the mere going into the place and sitting a certain time and coming out again is an acceptable act to God: mere formality, you see, is mistaken for spiritual worship! They are careful to have their infants sprinkled, but what the ceremony means they know not; and without looking into the Bible to see whether the Lord commands any such an ordinance, they offer him their ignorant will—worship either in obedience to custom, or in the super-

stition of ignorance. What the thing is, or why it is, they do not enquire, but go through a performance as certain parrots say their prayers. They know nothing about the inward and spiritual grace, which the Catechism talks about, if indeed, inward spiritual grace could ever be connected with an unscriptural outward and visible sign. When these poor souls come to the Lord's Supper, their thoughts go no farther than the bread and wine, or the hands which break the one and pour out the other; they know nothing whatever of communion with Jesus, of eating his flesh and drinking his blood; their souls have proceeded as far as the shell, but they have never broken into the kernel to taste the sweetness thereof. They have a name to lives and are dead; their religion is a mere show; a signboard without an inn a well-set table without meat; a pretty pageant where nothing is gold, but everything gilt nothing real, but all pasteboard, paint, plaster, and pretense. Nonconformists, your chapels swarm with such, and the houses of the Establishment are full of the same! Multitudes live and die satisfied with the outward trappings of religion, and are utter strangers to internal vital godliness. Yet such persons are not cursed in this life! No, they are to be pitied, to be prayed for, to be sought after, with words of love and honest truth; they are to be hoped for yet, for who knoweth but that God may call them to repentance, and they may yet receive the life of God into their souls?

Another very numerous class have *opinion but not faith,* creed but not credence. We meet them everywhere. How zealous they are for Protestantism! They would not only die for orthodoxy, but kill others as well. Perhaps it is the Calvinistic doctrine which they have received, and then the five points are as dear to them as their five senses. These men will contend, not to say earnestly, but savagely for the faith. They very vehemently denounce all those who differ from them in the smallest degree; and deal damnation round the land with amazing liberality to all who are not full weight according to the balance of their little Zoar, Rehoboth, or Jireh: while all the while the spirit of Christ, the love of the Spirit, bowels of compassion, and holiness of character are no more to be expected from them than grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles. Doctrine, my brethren, is to be prized above all price! Woe to the Church of God when error shall be thought a trifle, for truth be lightly esteemed; and when truth is gone, what is left? But, at the same time, we grossly mistake if we think that orthodoxy of creed will save us. I am sick of those cries of "the truth," "the truth," "the truth," from men of rotten lives and unholy tempers. There is an orthodox as well as a heterodox road to hell, and the devil knows how to handle Calvinists quite as well as Arminians. No pale of any Church can insure salvation, no form of doctrine can guarantee to us eternal life. "Ye must be born again." Ye must bring forth fruits meet for repentance. "Every tree which bringeth not forth fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." Stopping short of vital union to the Lord Jesus by real faith, we miss the great qualification for entering heaven. Yet the time is not come when these mere head-knowers are cursed. These trees have leaves only, but no fatal curse has withered them hopelessly. No; they are to be sought after; they

may yet know the Lord in their hearts, and the Holy Spirit may yet make them humble followers of the Lamb. O that it may be so!

A third class have *talk without feeling.* Mr. Talkative, in "Pilgrim's Progress," is the representative of a very numerous host. They speak very glibly concerning divine things. Whether the topic be doctrinal, experimental, or practical, they talk fluently upon everything. But evidently, the whole thing comes from the throat and the lip; there is no welling up from the heart. If the thing came from the heart it would be boiling, but now it hangs like an icicle from their lips. You know them—you may learn something from them, but all time while you are yourself aware that if they bless others by their words, they themselves remain unblessed. Ah! let us be very anxious lest this should be our own case. Let the preacher feel the anxiety of the apostle Paul, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should be a castavay; and let my hearers feel the same concern, lest, after talking about the timings of God, they should prove to be mere lip-servers, and not accepted children of the Most High.

Another tribe springs up just now before my eye—those who have *regrets without repentance.* Many of you under a heart-searching sermon feel grieved on account of your sins, and yet never have the strength of mind to give them up. You say you are sorry, but yet go on in the same course. You do really feel, when death and judgment press upon you, a certain sort of regret that you could have been so foolish, but the next day the strength of temptation is such, that you fall a prey to the very same infatuation. It is easy to bring a man to the river of regret, but you cannot make him drink the water of repentance. If Agag would be killed with words, no Amalekite would live. If men's transient sorrows for sin were real repentance on account of it, there is not a man living who would not, sometime or other, have been a true penitent. Here, however, are leaves only, and no fruit.

We have yet again, another class of persons who have *resolves without action.* They *will!* Ah! that they *will!* but it is always in the future tense. They are hearers, and they are even feelers, but they are not *doers* of the Word: it never comes to that. They would be free, but they have not patience to file their fetters, nor grace to submit their manacles to the hammer. They see the right, but they permit the wrong to rule them. They are charmed with the beauties of holiness, and yet deluded with the wantonness of sin. They would ran in the ways of God's commandments, but the road is too rough, and running is weary work. They would fight for God, but victory is hardly won, and so they turn back almost as soon as they have set out; they put their hand to the plough, and then prove utterly unworthy of the kingdom.

The great majority of persons who have any sort of religion at all, bear heaves, but they produce no fruit. I know there are some such here, and I solemnly warn you, though no curse falls upon you, though we do not think that the miracle now under consideration has any relation to you whatever, yet remember, there is nothing to be done with trees which bring forth only leaves, but in due time to use the axe upon them, and to cast them into the

fire: and *this must be your doom.* As sure as you live under the sound of the gospel, and yet are not converted by it, so surely will you be cast into outer darkness. As certainly as Jesus Christ invites you, and ye will not come, so certainly will he send his angels to gather the dead branches together, and you among them, to cast them into the fire. Beware! beware! thou fruitless tree! thou shalt not stand for ever! Mercy waters thee with her tears now; God's lovingkindness digs about thee still; still the husbandman comes, seeking fruit upon thee year after year. Beware! the edge of the axe is sharp, and the arm which wields it is nothing less than almighty. Beware! lest thou fall into the fire!

II. Secondly, THERE WERE OTHER TREES WITH NEITHER LEAVES NOR FRUIT, AND NONE OF THESE WERE CURSED!

The time of figs was not yet come. Now, as the fig tree either brings forth the fig before the leaf, or else produces figs and leaves at the same time, the major part of the trees, perhaps all of them, without exception of this one, were entirely without figs and without leaves, and yet Jesus did not curse any one of them, for the time of figs was not yet come.

What multitudes are destitute of anything like religion; they make no profession of it; they not only have no fruits of godliness, but they have no leaves even of outward respect to it; they do not frequent the court of the Lord's house; they use no form of prayer; they never attend upon ordinances. The great outlying mass of this huge city—how does religion affect it? It is a very sad thing to think that there are people living in total darkness next door to the light; that you may find in the very street where the gospel is preached, persons who have never heard a sermon. Are there not, throughout this city, tens and hundreds of thousands who know not their right hand from their left, in matters of godliness? Their children go to Sabbath schools, but they themselves spend the whole Sabbath day in anything except the worship of God! In our country parishes, very often neither the religion of the Establishment nor of Dissent, at all affects the population. Take, for instance, that village which will be disgracefully remembem'ed as long as Essex endures, the village of Hedingham. Theme are in that place not only parish Churches, but Dissenting meetinghouses, and yet the persons who foully murdered the poor wretch supposed to be a wizard, must have been as ignorant and indifferent to common sense, let alone religion, as even Hottentots or Kaffirs, to whom the light of religion has never come. Why was this? Is it not because there is not enough of missionary spirit among Christian people to seek out those who are in the lowest strata of society, so that multitudes escape without ever coming into contact with godliness at all? In London, the City Missionaries will bear witness that while they can sometimes get at the wives, yet there are thousands of husbands who are necessarily away at the time of the missionary's visit, who have not a word of rebuke, or exhortation, or invitation, or encouragement, ever sounding in their ears at all, from the day of their birth to the day of their death; and they might, for all practical purposes, as well have been born in the center of

Africa as in the city of London, for they are without God, without hope, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, far oft; not by wicked works only, but by dense ignorance of God.

These persons we may divide into two classes, upon neither of whom does the withering curse fall in this life. The first we look upon with hope. Although we see neither leaves nor fruit, we know that *"the time of figs is not yet."* They are God's *elect,* but they are *not called.* Their names are in the Lamb's Book of Life, and were there from before the foundations of the world; though they be dead in trespasses, they are the objects of divine love, and *they must,* in due time, be called by irresistible grace, and turned from darkness to light. "The Lord hath much people in this city," and this should be the encouragement of every one of you, to try to do good, that God has among the vilest of the vile, the most reprobate, the most debauched and drunken, an elect people who *must* be saved. When you take the Word to them, you do so because God has ordained you to be the messenger of life to their souls, and they must receive it, for so the decree of predestination runs; they must he called in the fullness of time to be the brethren of Christ and children of the Most High. They are *redeemed,* beloved friends, but not *regenerated*—as much redeemed with precious blood as the saints before the eternal throne. They are Christ's property, and yet perhaps, they are waiting around the ale-house at this very moment until the door shall open—bought with Jesus' precious blood, and yet spending their nights in a brothel, and their days in sin; but if Jesus Christ purchased them he will have them. If he counted down the precious drops, God is not unfaithful to forget the price which his Son has paid. He will not suffer his substitution to be in any case an ineffectual, dead thing. Tens of thousands of redeemed ones are not regenerated yet, but regenerated they must be; and this is your comfort and mine, when we go out with the quickening Word of God. Nay, more, these ungodly ones are prayed for by Christ before the throne. "Neither pray I for these alone," saith the great Intercessor, "but for *them also which shall believe* on me through their word." They do not pray for themselves; poor, ignorant souls, they do not know anything about prayer; but Jesus prays for them. Their names are on his breast, and ere long they must bow their stubborn knee, breathing the penitential sigh before the throne of grace. "The time of figs *is* not yet." The predestinated moment has not struck; but, when it comes, *they shall,* for God will have his own; they must, for the Spirit is not to be withstood when he cometh forth with power—*they must* become the willing servants of the living God. "My people shall be willing in the day of my power." "He shall justify many." "He shall see of the travail of his soul." "He shall divide a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong."

No curse falls upon these; they deserve it, but eternal love prevents it. Their sins write it, but the finished sacrifice blots it out. They may well perish because they seek not mercy, but Christ intercedes for them, and live they shall.

Alas! however, among those who have neither leaves nor fruit, there is another class which *never* bring forth either the one or the other; they live in sin and die in ignorance,

perishing without hope. As these leave the world, can they upbraid us for neglecting them? Are we clear of their blood? May not the blood of many of them cry from the ground against us? As they arc condemned on account of sins, may they not accuse us because we did not take the gospel to them, but left them where they were? Dread thought! but let it not be shaken off, there are tens of thousands every day who pass into the world of spirits unsaved, and inherit the righteous wrath of God. Yet in this life, you see, no special curse falls upon them, and this miracle has no special bearing upon them; it bears upon a totally different class of people, of whom we will now speak.

III. WE HAVE BEFORE US A SPECAL CASE.

I have already said, that in a fig tree, the fruit takes the precedence of the leaves, or the leaves and the fruit come at the same time; so that it is laid down as a general rule, that if there be leaves upon a fig tree, you may rightly expect to find fruit upon it.

To begin then with the explanation of this special case, *in a fig tree fruit comes before leaves.* So in a true Christian, fruit always takes the precedence of profession. Find a man anywhere who is a true servant of God, and before he united himself with the Church, or attempted to engage in public prayer, or to identify himself with the people of God, he searched to see whether he had real repentance on account of sin—he desired to know whether he had a sincere and genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and he perhaps tarried some little time to try himself to see whether there were the fruits of holiness in his daily life. Indeed, I may say that there are some who wait too long; they are so afraid lest they should make a profession before they have grace in possession, that they will wait year after year—too long—become unwise, and make what was a virtue become a vice. Still this is the rule with Christians: they first give themselves to the Lord and afterwards to the Lord's people according to his will. You who are the servants of God—do you not scorn to vaunt yourselves beyond your line and measure? Would you not think it disgraceful on your part to profess anything which you have not felt? Do you not feel a holy jealousy when you are teaching others, lest you should teach more than God has taught you? and are you not afraid even in your prayers lest you should use expressions which are beyond your own depth of meaning? I am sure the true Christian is always afraid of anything like having the leaves before he has the fruit.

Another remark follows from this—*where we see the leaves we have a right to expect the fruit.* When I see a man a Church-member, when I hear him engage in prayer, I expect to see in him, holiness, the character and the image of Christ. I have a right to expect it, because the man has solemnly avowed that he is the partaker of divine grace. You cannot join a Church without taking upon yourselves very solemn responsibilities. What do you desire when you come to see us, and ask to be admitted into fellowship? You tell us that you have passed from death unto life, that you have been born again, that there has been a change in you, the hike of which you never knew before, one which only God could have wrought.

You tell us you are in the habit of private prayer; that you have a desire for the conversion of others. If you did not so profess, we dare not receive you. Well now, having made these professions, it would be insincere on our part if we did not expect to see your characters holy, and your conversation correct; we have a right to expect it from your own professions. We have a right to expect it from the work of the Spirit which you claim to have received. Shall the Holy Spirit work in man's heart to produce a trifle? Do you think that the Spirit of God would have written us this Book, and that Jesus Christ would have shed his precious blood to produce a hypocrite? Is an inconsistent Christian the highest work of God? I suppose God's plan of salvation to be that which has more exercised his thoughts and wisdom than the making of all worlds and the sustenance of all providence; and shall this best, this highest, this darling work of God, produce no more than that poor, mean, talking, unacting, fruitless deceiver? Ye have no love for souls, no care for the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom, and yet think that the Spirit, has made you what you are! No zeal, no melting bowels of compassion, no cries of earnest entreaty, no wrestling with God, no holiness, no self-denial, and yet say that you are a vessel made by the Master and fitted for his use! How can this be? No; if you profess to be a Christian, from the necessity of the Spirit's work, we have a right to expect fruit from you. Besides, in genuine professors we do get the fruit, we see a faithful attachment to the Redeemer's cause, an endurance to the end, in poverty, in sickness, in shame, in persecution. We see other professors holding fast to the truth, they are not led aside by temptation, neither do they disgrace the cause they have espoused; and, if you profess to be one of the same order, we have a right to look for the same blessed fruits of the Spirit in you, and if we see them not you have belied us.

Observe further that *our Lord hungers for fruit.* A hungry person seeks for something which may satisfy him, for fruit, not leaves! Jesus hungers for your holiness. A strong expression, you will say, but I doubt not of its accuracy. For what were we elected? We were predestinated to be conformed unto the image of God's Son; we were chosen to good works, "which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." What is the end of our redemption? Why did Jesus Christ die? " He gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Why have we been called but that we should be called to be saints? To what end are any of the great operations of the covenant of grace? Do they not all point at our holiness? If you will think of any privilege which the Lord confers upon his people through Christ, you will perceive that they all aim at the sanctification of the chosen people—the making of them to bring forth fruit that God the Father may be glorified in them. O Christian, for this the tears of the Savior! for this the agony and bloody sweat! for this the five death-wounds! for this the burial and the resurrection, that he makes you holy, even perfectly holy like unto himself! And can it be, that when he hungers after fruit, you think nothing of fruit-bearing? O professor, how base art thou, to call thyself a blood-bought child of God, amid yet to live unto

thyself! How darest thou, O barren tree, professing to be watered by the bloody sweat, and digged by the griefs and woes of the wounded Savior—how darest thou bring forth leaves and no fruit? Oh! sacrilegious mockery of a hungry Savior! oh! blasphemous tantalizing of a hungry Lord! that thou shouldst profess to have cost him all this, and yet yield him nothing! When I think that Jesus hungers after fruit in me, it stirs me tip to do more for him. Does it not have the same effect on you? He hungers for your good works; he hungers to see you useful. Jesus the King of kings, hungers after your prayers—hungers after your anxieties for the souls of others; and nothing ever will satisfy him for the travail of his soul but seeing you wholly devoted to his cause.

This brings us into the very midst and meaning of the miracle. *There are some, then, who make unusual profession, and yet disappoint the Savior in his just expectations. The Jews* did this. When Jesus Christ came it was not the time of figs. The time for great holiness was after the coming of Christ and the pouring out of the Spirit. All the other nations were without leaves. Greece, Rome, all these showed no signs of progress; but there was the Jewish nation covered with leaves. They professed already to have obtained the blessings which he came to bring. There stood the Pharisee with his long prayers; there were the lawyers and the Scribes with their deep knowledge of the things of the kingdom. They said they had the light. The time of figs was not come, but yet they had the leaves, though not a single fruit; and you know what a curse fell on Israel; how in the day of Jerusalem's destruction the tree was withered altogether from its root, because it had its leaves, but had no fruit.

The same will be true of any *Church.* There are times when all the Churches seem sunken alike in lethargy—such a time we had, say ten years ago—but one Church, perhaps, seems to be all alive. The congregations are large. Much, apparently, is proposed for the growth of the Savior's kingdom. A deal of noise is made about it; there is much talk, and the people are all expectation; and, if there be no fruit, no real consecration to Christ, if there be no genuine liberality, no earnest vital godliness, no hallowed consistency, other Churches may live on; but such a Church as this, making so high a profession, and being so precocious in the produce of leaves, shall have a curse from God. No man shall eat fruit of it for ever, and it shall wither away.

In the case of *individuals* the moral of our miracle runs thus. Some are looked upon as *young believers,* who early join the Church. "The time of figs is not yet;" it is not a very ordinary case to see children converted, but we do see some, and we are very grateful. We are jealous however lest we should see leaves but not fruit. These juveniles are extraordinary cases; and on that account we look for higher results. When we are disappointed what shall come upon such but a curse upon their precocity, which led them to the deception. Some of us were converted, or profess to have been, when young, and if we have lived hitherto, and all we have produced has been merely words, resolves, professions, but not fruit unto God, we must expect the curse.

Again, *professsors eminent in station.* There are necessarily but few ministers, but few Church officers; but when men so distinguish themselves by zeal, or by louder professions than others, as to gain the ear of the Christian public and are placed in responsible positions—if they bring forth no fruit, they are the persons upon whom the curse will light. It may be with other Christians that "the time of figs is not yet;" they have not made the advances which these profess to have made; but having been, upon their own profession, elected to an office which essentially requires fruit, since they yield it not, let them beware.

*To those who make professions of much love to Christ,* the same caution may be given. With the most of Christians, I am afraid, I must say that "the time of figs is not yet," for we are too much like the Laodicean Church. But you meet with some men—how much they are in love with Christ! How sweetly they can *talk* about him, but what do they *do* for him? Nothing! nothing! Their love lies just in the wind which comes out of their own mouths, and that is all. Now, when the Lord has a curse, he will deal it out on such They went beyond all others in an untimely declaration of a very fervent love, and now they yield him no fruit. "Yes," said one, "I love God so much, that I do not reckon that anything I have is my own. It is all the Lord's—all the Lord's, and I am his steward." Well, this dear good man, of course, joined the Church, and after a time, some mission work wanted a little help. What was his reply? "When I pay my seat rent, I have done all I intend to do." A man of wealth and means! After a little time, this same man found it inconvenient even to pay for his seat, and goes now to a place not quite so full, where he can get a seat and do nothing to support the ministry! If there is a special thunderbolt anywhere, it is these unctions hypocrites who whine about love to Christ, and bow down at the shrine of mammon.

Or, take another case. You meet with others whose profession is not of so much love, but it is of *much experience.* Oh! what experience they have had! What deep experience! Ah! they know the humblings of heart and the plague of human nature! They know the depths of corruption, and the heights of divine fellowship, and so on. Yes, and if you go into the shop you find the corruption is carried on behind the counter, and the deceit in the daybook; if they do not know the plague of their own hearts, at least they are a plague to their own household. Such people are abhorrent to all men, and much more to God.

Others you meet with *who have a censorious tongue.* What good people they must be; they can see the faults of other people so plainly! This Church is not right, and the other is not right, and yonder preacher—well some people think him a very good man, but they do not. They can see the deficiencies in the various denominations, and they observe that very few really carry out Scripture as it should be carried out. They complain of want of love, and are the very people who create that want. Now if you will watch these very censorious people, the very faults they indicate in others, they are indulging in themselves; and while they are seeking to find out the mote in their brother's eye, they have a beam in their own. These are the people who are indicated by this fig tree, for they ought, according to their

own showing, taking t hem on their own ground, to be better than other people. If what they say be true, they are bright particular stars, and they ought to give special light to the world. They are such that even Jesus Christ himself might expect to receive fruit from them, but they are nothing but deceivers, with these high soarings and proud boastings; they are nothing after all but pretenders. Like Jezebel with her paint, which made her all the uglier, they would seem to be what they are not. As old Adam says, "They are candles with big wicks and no tallow, and when they go out they make a foul and nauseous smell." "They have summer sweating on their brow, and winter freezing in their hearts." You would think them the land of Goshen, but prove them the wilderness of sin. Let us search ourselves, lest such be the case with us.

IV. And now to close, SUCH A TREE MIGHT WELL BE WITHERED. *Deception is abhorred of God.* There was the Jewish temple, there were the priests standing in solemn pomp, there were the abundant sacrifices of God's altar. But was God pleased with his temple? No, because in the temple you had all the leaves, you had all the externals of worship, but there was no true prayer, no belief in the great Lamb of God's passover, no truth, no righteousness, no love of men, no care for the glory of God; and so the temple, which had been a house of prayer, had become a den of thieves. You do not marvel that the temple was destroyed. You and I may become just like that temple. We may go on with all the externals of religions, nobody may miss us out of our seat at Tabernacle, nay, we may never miss our Christian engagements; we may be in all external matters more precise than we used to be, and yet for all that, we may have become in our hearts a den of thieves; the heart may be given to the world while external ceremonies are still kept up and maintained. Let us beware of this, for such a place cannot be long without a curse. It is abhorrent to God.

Again, *it is deceptive to man.* Look at that temple! What do men go there for? To see holiness and virtue. Why tread they its hallowed courts? To get nearer to God. And what do they find there? Instead of holiness, covetousness; instead of getting nearer to God, they get into the midst of a mart where men are haggling about the price of doves, and bickering with one another about the changing of shekels. So men may watch to hear some seasonable word from our lips, and instead of that, may get evil; and as that temple was cursed for deluding men, so may we be, because we deceive and disappoint the wants of mankind.

More than this, this barren fig tree *committed sacrilege upon Christ,* did it not? Might it not have exposed him to ridicule? Some might have said, "How goest thou to a tree, thou prophet, whereon there is no fruit?" A false professor exposes Christ to ridicule. As the temple of old dishonored God, so does a Christian when his heart is not right; he does dishonor to God, and makes the holy cause to be trodden under foot of the adversary. Such men indeed have reason to beware.

Once more, this tree might well be cursed, because its bringing forth nothing but leaves was a plain evidence of its sterility. It had force and vitality, but it turned it to ill account,

and would continue to do so. The curse of Christ was but a confirmation of what it already was. He did as good as say, "He that is unfruitful, let him be unfruitful still." And now, what if Christ should come into this Tabernacle this morning, and should look on you and on me, and see in any of us great profession and great pomp of leaves, and yet no fruit, what if he should pronounce the curse on us, what would be the effect? We should wither away as others have done. What mean we by this? Why, they have on a sudden turned to the world. We could not understand why such fair saints should, on a sudden, become such black devils; the fact was, Christ had pronounced the word, and they began to wither away. If he should pronounce the unmasking word on any mere professor here, and say, "Let no man eat fruit of thee for ever," you will go into gross outward sin and wither to your shame. This will take place probably on a sudden; and taking place, your case will be irretrievable; you never afterwards will be restored. The blast which shall fall upon you will be eternal; you will live as a lasting monument of the terrible justice of Christ, as the great head of the Church; you will be spared to let it be seen that a man outside the Church may escape with impunity in this life, but a man inside the Church shall have a present curse, and be made to stand as a tree blasted by the lightning of God for ever. Now, this is a heart-searching matter. It went through me yesterday when I thought, "Well, here am I, I have professed to be called of God to the ministry; I have forced myself into a leading place in God's Church; I have voluntarily put myself into a place where sevenfold damnation is my inevitable inheritance if I be not true and sincere." I could almost wish myself back out of the Church, or at least in the obscurest place in her ranks, to escape the perils and responsibilities of my position; and so may you, if you have not the witness of the Spirit in you that you are born of God—you may wish that you never thought of Christ, and never dreamed of taking his name upon you. If you have by diligence worked yourself into a high position among God's people; if you have mere leaves without the fruit, the more sure is the curse, because the greater the disappointment of the Savior. The more you profess, the more is expected of you; and if you do not yield it, the more just the condemnation when you shall be left to stand for ever withered by the curse of Christ. O men and brethren, let us tremble before the heart-searching eye of God; but let us still remember that grace can make us fruitful yet. The way of mercy is open still. Let us apply to the wounds of Christ this morning. If we have never begun, let us begin now. Now let us throw our arms about the Savior, and take him to be ours; and, having done this, let us seek divine grace, that for the rest of our lives we may work for God. Oh! I do hope to do more for God, and I hope you will. O Holy Spirit, work in us mightily, for in thee is our fruit found! Amen.